

Historic Interview Transcript

General Topic : Historic Ranching

Date of Interview : 9/9/91 Place : Straus's cabin, Fish Creek Rd.

Personal Data :

Narrator

Name : Albert Straus

Address : 555 Freeman Rd. Space 7, Central Point, Oregon 97502

Birthplace : Buena Vista County, Albert City, Iowa

Birthdate : March 18, 1905

Occupation : Rancher - Stockman

Interviewer

Name : Randy Charon

USDA Forest Service Office and Department : Toketee R.S., Umpqua N.F.

RC: Albert, I thought we could start with your biographical background to start. When were you born and where?

AS: I was born in the state of Iowa, Buena Vista County, in 1905, March the 18th. I've been in the ranching business ever since I was a minor, boy. I started in milking cows, when I was about seven years old. And then went into livestock business and dairying, up until 1954. Then we went into beef all together, sold the dairy and went into beef. I've been into beef every since. But, we were in beef from 1921 to 1930, before we went into dairy business. We also carried a bunch of beef cows as long as we were going through the milking cycle - dairy.

RC: Did your family reside also in Iowa?

AS: Yes, yes; my family, we all came here in 1916 in the state of Iowa and we lived in Oregon every since. We were in the farming business, back there, but we milked a few cows, but mainly, it was strictly farming. And my dad decided to, we all boys and you know, most of us were boys, and we wanted to come and be cowboys. That was biggest thing to live to look at, or look ahead to anyway. But he finally decided O.K., to come out and he come out and made the deal and we moved here in Febuary of 1916. We lived on in the ranch in Sam's Valley from 1916 to 1964. And we sold the ranch. We've accumulated quite a lot of extra land besides what we bought that time. We had 240 acres to start with and we ended up with 960 acres, when we sold out. So we had quite a big spread at that time.

RC: Your family was interested in the outdoors also?

AS: Oh Yes, my dad was quite a outdoor man and all the family were boys anyway. We were all outdoor people, but they all lived at home until they, they were quite young, you know, until they got out of school and they left and I stayed with the ranch. I guess i was the only one, I guess dumb enough to stay on the farm. I tell ya, that time during the depression days, I had to skimp along pretty, pretty slim, for a number of years. And my wife and I were first married in 1928, we just had to live on \$15.00 or \$20.00 a month. That's all the money we could scrape up. We had a good garden and that's how we survived. It was tough, tough going.

RC: What were some of your pastimes and interest while growing up?

AS: Well, at that time, you know, you didn't have T.V. or anything that way. Some of us had radios, but they had organized a grange out there in Sam's Valley where we lived. And I was only, I think I was only 23 years old and I was elected as a assistant steward in the grange the first year. And the master would'nt come to grange, that was elected, so the next year, I was elected as master and I served as 12 years as master of the Sam's Valley Grange. Then I was elected as master of another grange and I served on the county grange for four years. And I finally got into dairying so heavy, I just could'nt take care of the job, so I just got out of it. But that was mainly our recreation, was the grange. Because, we put on programs, you know, and we put on real good programs and we put on real good lectures. We put on plays and all kinds of things to entertain people. And we had 125 - 150 people come out to every one of our meetings. And them people, at that time, that was the only recreation they had. Today, the granges are mostly old people, but the young people are not interested in those things. Nowadays, they have other things to entertain themselves. It's quite a change back from the early 1900's up til now.

RC: 150 people! That's quite the congregation at that time.

AS: Oh yes, yes, just for one little grange. Today, they are so small, they are just barely existing and that's all. We built a nice grange out there. People themselves, people who belonged to the grange built it and didn't hire any outside help at all. They all got together and poured the cement for the foundation, put up the building, the whole works. And they also, that year, we gave dances. My wife and I, and a couple of other couples there, took dances on every Saturday night. 'Cause, we had the grange on one Saturday night and dance on one Saturday night. And sometimes we raise as high as 400 dollars a night in one dance. In them days, we'd charge a dollar, for a person to get in, for your admission fees. But we did real good, until we moved away in 1964. And I don't know, maybe we had something to do with keeping the grange open, but's its been going downhill every since we left there. But I don't attend, because it's just too far for me to go back and forth. I live in Central Point; I attend the grange there once in awhile, but mainly I just kinda dropped out of it altogether. But I figured I served my time. I was a member of the State Grange and a member of the National Grange. So I have a pretty good background of the grange work. And at one time, I was the youngest master in the state. 'Cause I figured I had a pretty good record for me, because when I took over there, I had no experience in my life, because I just graduated from high school. And I had to get up there before the crowd and I had quite a time in the first year getting, you know, you had to understand Robert's Rules and order's, in order to carry your programs through. And a lady, that was from Eagle Point, that was an ex-school teacher, and she taught me more about Robert's Rules and Orders, than any other person that I was around. That helped me and advanced me in my work and that's what my background is.

RC: You mentioned that everyone pitched in to build the grange. It seems like people used to really pitch in, in those days.

AS: Oh yeah! Everybody helped, you know. Everybody wanted to get their hand into it, to know they were part of it. They felt like it was part of their building. Everybody helped and we put on a dinner or lunch for the people, you know, and you'd have 25, 30, or 40 people working. We couldn't have too many, because they get in the way of the ones that were working. We'd have a nice crowd. But thats as far as me and my life, you know, the grange work did, because after that, I got out in a lot of different committees. I served on the S.C. Committee for 27 years, served on the Federal Land Bank for about 24 years, and I was director on it. And also I was school director, school board director and I was on the Farmer's Home Committee; a lot of different ones. I was quite in demand in those days and I was capable of handling it, because I had the experience. That was

the only reason I think I was hunted on those different things. And I never regretted it, cause it taught me alot. I'll tell you right now, being able to serve on all those things. I served 27 years straight on the S.C. Committee, so I finally had to retire. I got 70 years old and I had to get off. I got too old.

RC: Where did you go to school again, Albert?

AS: I went to school in Sam's Valley. Back where we lived in Sam's Valley, they had grade school. Went to grade school right in the place where we lived. It was only about an 1/8 mile from where our home was, to the school. And when I graduated from 8th grade, they built a new school in 1920. And I started school, in the fall of "20" and went through and graduated in "24". I went one year to Gold Hill High School and we didn't have any high school out there yet, after I graduated. My dad kept me home one year from school. He didn't want me to go to school. He said he needed me more at home. So I was determined I was going to have a high school education, and I did, I got it. So I'm glad of that anyway. I never did get a chance to go to college. Maybe that was better in the long run after all, in the kind of life I lived. I farmed all my life.

RC: Did you have much of a walk to school?

AS: No, not when we were going to grade school. We just had to cross the field; it was just less than an 1/8th of a mile. But when we went to high school, we had two miles to walk each way, because they didn't have no school busses in those days. We walked early in the morning and back at night, which was good exercise for us; kept us in good shape. In them days, we didn't think anything about walking to school. Today, they won't walk 100 yards to meet the bus. The bus comes to pick 'em up, quite a difference.

RC: What brought you to the Diamond Lake area?

AS: Well, we were in the beef cattle business and we knew some of the people, that were running cattle at that time, in 1920. They ran in here from about 1918 on. And we came in here in 1921 and we run of here from 1921 to 1930. And then we sold our beef herd and went into dairy business. But I still kept coming up here, cause I liked the country so well. And a fellow, by the name of Earl Day, was running cows up here and he had it made up here, so his brother left and went away from home. So, he had to have somebody help him and he wanted somebody that knew the country. So, I helped him for about 5 or 6 years. And then finally, one of the boys came back and helped him out. So, I didn't come up and just now and then, when they needed some help, I'd come up for just a day or so. Otherwise, I was just to busy at home. But, I come up here one day, and I remember John Day wanted to get some increase in his range permit. And I said, no, I couldn't come up, I was just too busy. And he says, "will 100 dollars a day antagonize you to go?" And I says "yeah", well I couldn't turn that down. So, I come up and rode for him for two days and took the Assistant Ranger, out of the Rogue River National Forest and the ranger out of Union Creek. Long and John went along, John Day went along and we showed the whole country and showed him every meadow up here. And John got his increase in his range permit; he looked at all the grass there was. So, that was where I got my education. Of course, when we were running cattle up here, it was our third year, about 1924, why, some of the older fellas quit. I went out of the range and within a year, I had to learn the range all by myself. And that's how I really learned the country, as well as I do. I know about every inch of this whole area. You might say, from Dog Prairie, to clear down to here. Well, clear down to Prospect. But we'd run Prospect area for 4 or 5 years down there, you know. That's as long as we'd been up here, but we had a 450 head permit up until last year and then we sold out 250 head of it. I guess I figured I was getting too old to handle it anymore.

RC: Can you tell me about some of your early cattle drives where most of them were at?

AS: Well, most of them started at Sam's Valley. Took us 4 days to come up. Of course, in them days, when we were driving the cattle, we only had the lower country. We didn't have this high area, because the sheep, all the time, had all the high country.

RC: Up in the Skookum area?

AS: Yes, up in the Skookum, Dog Prairie, and Fish Creek and Fish Mountain. And all that area was sheep - sheep range and all we had was this low country here. We had Beaver Meadows and Hammaker and all this area down in here. And all the way down up in these creeks. 'Cause, in them days, you had beaver up in here and you had nice grass all up and down these meadows up here. And now, there is nothing but "ripgut". We call it "ripgut", 'cause, the cows it's that old course water grass and boy, the cows don't care much for it, plus frosted. We start out on the drive one day and we had to go about 10 miles and then we'd stay all night. Then, it take us 3 more days to come on in. So, a 4 day drive to come in. Then, when we come on up to look after our cattle, we'd have to ride our horses up, cause, you didn't have anything to haul your horses on. So, it took up 2 days to ride in and 2 days to ride back out again, in the summer. And, in the fall, why, we'd went to round up, why, we'd gather our cattle here and we'd have 'em corraled at Hammaker and we'd lock 'em up there all night. Then, we'd drive 'em to Barbi Creek, in the Barbi Creek Basin at night and we'd hold 'em over there for about 10 days. And we kept going, then we'd gather a whole bunch together. And at that time we were running, we must have been running about 1000 head of cattle in here. Or more maybe, I don't know for sure what. And we'd start the drive down and it would take 4 days to drive down from up here. We'd have a different places to stop on the way. It was quite a drive. I know, between Prospect and Union Creek, in those straight stretches, you'd look ahead and you'd think you was never going to get to the next curve. Slow moving cattle, you know, they don't move very fast, when they get tired.

RC: How did you get your provisions in? Your food and supplies?

AS: Well, we had to bring 'em in on a pickup, you know, I mean, not a pickup, but a car. We hauled it in on a car. You know, we had a Model T Ford and brought the things in on that. Then, they finally got an old Model T Ford truck and we used that. And we had quite a time sometimes, getting out of here in fall, because in those days, you didn't have anything but chains. And old Diamond Lake road, the new highway wasn't here and you had to come in on that and you had those steep grades to climb. It was a problem. Except we tried to get our cattle out before fall time, because we got caught in here clear after Thanksgiving even then. But we had a heavier loss in those days, then you have today, because you just couldn't find all of them. Some of them would get back on the sheep range and you'd never be able to find them, you know. And them sheep had all gone out and you wouldn't know where to look. But today, why, all the low country done away with now and hardly any pasturing is done on the low range now. Now it's all in the high country.

RC: That's something you definitely have to take into account, for the wintertime.

AS: Oh, you bet! You got to get 'em out of here. You have to to be out by the 5th of November, usually, if you're going to play it safe. We got caught in here with 4 feet of snow. That's too much for a cow to travel through, you know, when you get that deep.

RC: During WW2, you were granted a priority exemption. Can you tell me about that?

AS: Well, yes. I was just the right age to go to the Army at that time, but we were in the dairy business and they needed the milk, you know. My folks weren't always able to hire anybody, any milkers. So, they gave me a rating 4H, which they said disqualified as a soldier, you know, and I was more important at home than I was there. So, that's where I stayed. Some people called me "draft dodger" and everything else, but I told em it wasn't my fault. I would have gone into the Army, if they rated me that, but they said I was more essential at home. And we were producing whole milk, at the time, and hauled to to Camp Wright, which was close to it right there. And our permit jumped from 4 dollars and something, to 7 dollars and something, which was quite a hike in those days. And we appreciated that extra money during the war. So, that's how we, how I stayed out of the Army. I never asked for, to be exempted or nothing else, I just took my rating. And we had to have special permits to, you know, for, you'd have to have a thing written out so you could get, so you could buy gasoline. Before you could buy tires or anything like that, we had to go to the draft board to get that. It was a tough time, but we made more money during the war than we made any other time in the decade. Prices were good.

RC: Was gasoline and things like that rationed out?

AS: Oh, yes. They were all rationed out at the time. Nobody could ^{buy} 'em at all, unless you were in the business, where you needed it. We had a fellow, he was a tire man in Medford. Sam Jennings Tire Company. And he kept us in tires. We had old tires that would wear out and we'd fill out applications for a new tire, then it would take a couple of weeks to get it through, you know. He'd put a new tire on for us, to get us by until we'd get a new tire. He was really an outstanding man to dairymen, you know. And people needed them, because we had to haul our milk in everyday to Medford. We were in the whole milk business from 1930 to 1964. In the last 10 years, why, we had a milk tank at the time and the truck would come around and would pick it up at that time. It was all hauled in cans, everyday. And for a long time, we had to haul milk twice a day. In the morning to Medford and in the evening. As soon as you got through milking, you'd be heading for town again. It was just tough going. I know I wouldn't want to go through that cycle again, like I went through in my young days. People today would never, would never do it. I don't think you could get any young man to do what we had to go through.

RC: Things were a lot tougher back then.

AS: Oh you bet! Of course, they were tougher people. you were brought up to work, you know. You knew what work was and you didn't think anything about it, because that's what you were cut out for. You know today, most of the people you hire come from school and places like that and they only work half a day and quit. They say, "Oh my muscles are too tired or sore and I can't do anymore." That's because they were never broke into it, you know. You got to have yourself broke into something like that or you'd never make a go of it. That's what our daily chore is, everyday, we worked everyday. We knew how to work. that's one thing my dad was always very strict on us. He taught us all how to work, you know. And everyone of us in my family, and there was 11 of us, you know. And they all knew how to work and make a go of it with our lives.

RC: Can you tell me about your early encounters with Charley Neal?

AS: Well, the first time I met Charley Neal was...I don't know how many years ago, but he was a State Policeman in the Medford area. And I met him 2 or 3

different times and he was on the game commission as a game warden. I had a chance to meet him 2 or 3 times back then, but I never got a chance personally to get as well acquainted with him as well as I did the last 8 or 10 years. When he come up here, the first thing he did was look me up to see where I was at, because he heard I was running cattle up here, you know. Because I hadn't seen him in years since. After he left Medford, he went into the lumber - logging business. He bought a ranch up by Eugene, somewhere out of Eugene. And in the logging, he got hurt and had to get out of that. Then he went into another business and then he finally came back to the Forest Service. But he was on here, he say's he can remember me way back when I was, when he was on the trail crew. But I can't remember him at all. It was Fish Creek, I think, is where he said of the time he knew of me. That's been years ago. But Charley was an outstanding man.

RC: Can you tell me about the old Skookum Prairie Lookout?

AS: Well, it sit right out in the open up there. The first year we went in, the range was open, you know. John Day had made a application for it and then he said he couldn't fulfill it all. So, we said we'd take half of it. So, we put in 50 head the first year and John never came in with his head, with his amount of cattle on the range. And the lookout was sitting in and they had a little shelter and the Forest Service had built a corral. A wire corral around there, and we was able to corral our cattle in places and bring 'em down to the main camp, where we had to load 'em out. And the lookout was there for, I don't know, probably 4 years, something like that, or 5 years, and they burned it down. For no unknown reason. I don't know why. I think they said they were afraid people was going to stay in it. So, they tore it all down. It's better to have people live in it, than have it burned down like it is now. There ain't nothing there now. Right now. They had a nice shelter. People could get in under and it wasn't hurting anybody. Out of the way, you know, and out of sight too, and they burned it down also. So, it was the same thing with Skookum. they had a nice lookout up there and burned it down and threw everything on the ground and left it lay. We went up there and gathered up a whole bunch of stuff. And I don't remember, one young lady that was along with us, she gathered up an old washboard, an old style washboard, they had up there to wash clothes with, and washtub and dishes, plates cups and everything. We brought a whole bunch of stuff, we still have quite a lot of it in the cabin yet. It was all laying there on the ground, just laying for somebody to pick up. So, we figured well, we just as well have it, as someone else. So we made use of it.

RC: And it was burned in the mid - sixties, wasn't it?

AS: Yes, about along the early - sixties, somewhere along there, but they burned it down. So, it was there about 10 years. We came in here in "54", in the high range and it was burned down 6 - 8 yaers after that. I stayed all night in that thing a couple of times myself, you know. We got caught in bad weather up there, so we stayed out there until the next day and then came on down. We were afoot, we weren't riding horses in those days. I hiked alot of that country, but not anymore.

RC: The big rock cairn that is on the edge of the meadow, that you can see from the L.O. was built by Forest Service personnel. Is that correct?

AS: That is correct. That was built probably, I'd say somewhere in the 30's. Probably in the early 30's. Somewhere along there. They had a trail crew that camped there and I had the opportunity of being up there at the time, you know. And I went over and talked to the fella and there was a possibility of little deals being up there, I don't know. But, they built the fort. But, I was watching them work on it there and I went back and seen what they put up. I

don't know what year it was for sure it was built. But, I know it was back there back in the early sixties, but, it was definitely was built by the Forest Service Trail crew.

RC: Do you know of any other rock cairns that were built by Forest Service personnel or white men?

AS: No, I don't know of any other ones. I found one up here on Fish Mountain that was built by somebody, but, we don't know who. We dug into it. We thought an old legend went around, there was some Spaniards that captured the Indians. Either the Indians captured them or they captured the Indians and they stole their gold. And they had it buried there. That had been passed around the schools here at the time and we found that place up there, because the description kind of fell in line with what the legend was. So, John Day and I went up and dug into it and went down to about four feet and we never could find anything. And we looked around for other spots, you know, because usually you always have markers around it and we never could find anything. And I've tried to go back and find it again and I can't now. I can't find where it's at. It's grown up so much with brush and stuff. It's much different than it was at the time. At the spot, that was the only I had a chance to dig into.

RC: Can you tell me about any of the local homesteaders?

AS: You mean up here?

RC: In this area?

AS: I don't know of any homesteaders up here, at all that I can recall anybody, but, a lot of homesteaders down where we lived. In the place in Sam's Valley where we lived, there were some homesteaders by the name of McClendon's. Right back in 1952 or "53", someplace back in there. And that's the place he still owned when we bought it. He had a mortgage on it though. Another fellow bought it, but he did not pay out on it until we bought it from him. And I stayed with him one full year, the old folks and their daughter. I went to school in Gold Hill and worked in a grocery store and helped 'em out, you know, because the old fellow passed away a couple years later. And there was about 2 or 3 homesteads right there in Sam's valley that was done in the early fifties. A couple of houses are still standing today. Big, old, 2 story homes, you know, and square built and the boards were just upright. Didn't have any siding in. Had the siding on the outside and just the boards on the inside with paper. Wallpapers got stood up and that's the way the house was built. We had to remodel the whole thing when we moved to Oregon, to make it livable.

RC: Did you build this cabin here?

AS: John Day built this cabin, 1938. He had it built. We had a cabin over at Hammaker. A log cabin, and we used it all the time and the Forest Service wanted to get rid of it. And so John, he made a deal with Carl Young, which was the Forest Supervisor at that time. And he called and asked Carl why he wanted to tear it down. He said, "you give me a spot where I can build a cabin", he says, "I'll build a big one and you can burn that one down. So, they come in here and looked this one over and agreed to give him the go ahead on it. So, John built this in 1938. I stayed in it the first night anybody ever slept in this cabin. We had 6 of us come up here to hunt for cattle. And the fireplace hadn't even got dry enough yet. We had to put a small fire in it - snow about 2 feet deep. Quite an experience through riding up. Then, John owned this cabin all these years, until we bought him out. In those days, he gave us access to use it for 1/2 interest, kind of like 1/2 interest of it. Then we bought it then, from that date, we bought out 1/2 interest and then from John, we bought out the other 1/2

interest. But now, the Forest Service told us we don't have any equity in it, no right to it. That the cabin must be torn down and the permit orders given up. The Forest Service also has a different idea on it and according to the Forest, they told us well, if you ever quit and want to get out of the Forest altogether and want to let your cabin go and to permit, why the Forest Service will take it over. And the officer on the Prospect says now, we got to move off because we give up our permit. So I don't know who's right. And sometime along the line, there was a contract written up, but nobody can find it. Of course John Day is gone and we don't know what happened to his copy. And the Forest Service says they don't have a copy of it, so we're just sitting on a nail here just waiting to see what's going to happen. We got a lot of money in this cabin. We probably got 20 - 30 thousand dollars tied up in this cabin alone. But the snow caved it in about 10 years ago and it had a shingle roof. The snow would freeze on the roof and it was ^{top} much ~~to~~ weight for 1/2 a year and it broke down next to the fireplace and broke the top off the chimney. Knocked out the whole side of the cabin. So we come back and rebuilt the whole thing and fixed it up nice inside. And we've had a nice cabin out of it every since. We probably got \$15,000 in ourselves. And I know John put more than \$15,000 in when he built it. He had to clear all this ground off, because it was all covered with timber. This was all solid timber here until the "62" wind, when it blew it in here down. But now, it's all pretty well opened in here. All this is cool and nice all summer. Now, we get the hot sun sometimes in the summertime. It's comfortable at least. It's close to water, that makes a lot of difference.

RC: This historic Rough Creek Trail that went through Skookum Prairie down along Skookum Lake; did you used to use that trail quite often?

AS: Well, the only time we'd ever use it is whenever we'd cross - go down into Rough Creek Canyon in through Devil's Canyon and up the other side to Dog Creek. Then we'd use the trail, otherwise we'd never use it, because it was too steep to drive cattle over. And the cows would come in from Dog Creek side and the Dog Creek Canyon and over the top and go down into Devil's Canyon but, it was impossible to go down from Skookum down on that side. But I travelled the ridge on Rough Creek above on top several times and went through the canyon several times on the old trail. It was quite a chore. We just went around hanging bluffs hanging straight down below you. It was worse ~~worse~~ than the one they have there now, going to Skookum Lake. Yeah, I've been down to Skookum Lake several times and anybody who enjoys outdoor life, should go in and see Skookum Lake. I certainly would recommend they do, because it is quite an obstacle out there.

RC: You bet! Can you tell me about the outlaw named Duncan, that was hiding in the Skookum area?

AS: Yes, he went up here. I don't know what year it was. It was way back, undoubtedly, it was probably.... it was early in the fifties, somewhere along there when he was here. He was here close in the thirties on through. He stayed up here for a number of years. He had 2 outlying cabins and then he used the old ranger cabin. The old ranger station cabin at Hammaker. He had one on Buck Canyon and he also had one on Sherwood. And he was a short, stocky fellow. He had beady eyes. He could almost look a hole through you and he was a man that didn't make friends with hardly anybody at all. And we were just lucky enough we treated him nice and told him about a cougar that we seen and caught it in a trap. And also the old man, Day, had darned him some socks, his wife had darned 'em, you know, and he decided he didn't want them anymore and gave them to the old man and he finally got friendly with us, you know. But he still gave us a warning: stay away from his cabin, he didn't want anybody fooling around. Those cabins were just little huts about, well you know, you had to bend over to get in 'em. They had a little door cut in the front end and you crawled through that to get in the inside. He had a stove in each one of them and a little bed. And a

place for you to sit and that's all the room there was in 'em. They weren't more than about 8 feet wide and 8 foot long, or 10 foot long maybe. Long enough anyway, for a stove to sit ahead of his bed. That's the way both of his cabins were built that way. But, they're both gone now, they, one of 'em rotted away on up. Sherwood and the other one, people burned up for wood when they camped there. The campers burned it up. But he was a man, that when he got in trouble on Elk Creek and shot Phil Lowd, why, he took off and they tried to capture him and nobody could get him. He was just to sly for em. And he finally, and his nephew came over from Tiller. He had come in there and he had turned him in, because he was afraid he was going to freeze to death through the winter months. And he made a deal with a head officer down the line, they'd give him life imprisonment, if he turned him in. So, thats what he got. He went up to the penitentiary, up in Salem and he was a guard or something outside. I don't know what he, or, not a guard, but whatever they had for him to look after the ground anyway. Til he died. He's been dead now for probably 10 or 15 years.

RC: Phil Lowd was a Oregon State Policeman?

AS: Yeah, he was a Oregon State Policeman. Yeah, he got shot on Elk Creek. Yeah, he went into his cabin there and they had arraigned him once before. The two of 'em did, so Duncan had warned him: stay away from there because if he didn't he was going to shoot him. He went right back and did it over again. The next time he, He got it. Then he took off. Because that's where he spent his summers was on Elk Creek. You know, because he couldn't trap up here by then, so he was down there. Then he, during the winter months, usually he'd come up here about, oh somewhere along the latter part of September or the 1st of October. He'd move into his cabin and he make his run, one cabin to the next and back to the starting point. We met him a lot of times on the trail and he was always very friendly to us. He was one loner. But, he certainly wasn't to a lot of people. He was one loner. I think he lived too many years by himself. I think he turned him that way. I certainly couldn't say nothing against him, because he always treated us fair.

RC: Didn't he steal somebody's lunch one time, when some folks were looking for him?

AS: Yeah, they had a half - breed Indian and another fellow looking for him up there, you know. And they were sitting on a log somewhere in this country. I don't know just where, because they had tore all the cabins down to keep him from staying in them. And while they was eating the lunch, he sneaked in and stole the lunch, sitting right down beside of them and got away with it. And they didn't even know until they went to reach for their lunch. And the old Indian, the half - breed Indian said, " if anyone can do that, I'm through hunting him." And he quit, got out of it. Hell, that's been years ago.

RC: Do you recall that Indian's name?

AS: No, I don't. I Don't know what his name was. He came from Klamath. He was a half - breed.

RC: Charley knew him, didn't he?

AS: Yeah, Charley knew him. Yeah, he was well acquainted with him.

RC: How about mining in this area? Can you tell me if you know anything about mining in this area?

AS: We mostly had a lot of talk on it, you know, hearsays and so forth. I've

still got my first mine yet, to have anything show up in it. They had a big mine over on the Fish Creek side. Two old fellows mined on it for 3 or 4 years. They claimed they hit it good and they went out that fall and never showed up again. Then another old claimjumper came in and we filed a claim on it. And he also had other claims on it down on Hunter Creek in two different places, but there was nothing ever come of it. But, they had a rumor, that there was a some, I guess he was a kind of a half - breed or Spaniard, I don't know what he was, had a cabin way on Fish Creek and he had a mine that was real rich. And somewhere or another, he got killed and nobody knows where the mine is. I know, Charley Neal, he always had his truck coming on in here and he always wanted me to go with him sometime, when he had a day off, see if we could find it. But, both of us weren't good enough on our feet anymore, to hunt for it. So, we never got up there, because it was too hard of going for horses, you know, to get back up there where it was supposed to be. But, there has been several mining claims; rumors about different spots of gold, but, we never found em. Because I never got too interested in it. Because I just figured they were just rumors.

RC: Modern technology has made your job easier over the years. Can you tell me how? Describe how?

AS: Mining?

RC: Not mining, but modern technology.

AS: Oh yeah, well, of course everything has changed, you know, when we started out years ago. We started with horses, that was the beginning of the farming of it on. And it was walk, walk, walk, plowing and everything else. Then you came out with the old Ford tractor. Then you pull the one plow behind it, then you got bigger tractors and kept coming up on it. You had to cut your grain with a binder and go out and shock it. Then you haul it in with a wagon to the station, with the threshing machine, then you thresh it. It took about 15 men to thresh. Where nowadays, it takes one man to thresh with a combine. And we just gradually came up from that to a small combine to a 6 foot cut and then finally a 12 foot cut. And we just until now today, we have a big cabover, air - conditioned combine. So, it's quite a change. But, we raised alfalfa seeds for about 10 years and it was about the worse job I've ever had, because that alfalfa dust, you know, is such a fine dust and you just looked as black as coal, when you'd come in, in the evening. But today, you can just sit up in that cab up there and have your air - conditioning on and it blows all the dust away. So, the changes have been tremendous. Everything. We went away from the horse and buggy days to the car and truck days today.

RC: Can you tell me about any changes that you've seen up in this area, that you don't like?

AS: Well, yeah, there are quite a few of them. One thing is the way they raped our forest, you know. Went in here and and just taken out these clearcuts one after another and got nothing back for a price. A few of em, they done fairly good on, but so many of them are just an eyesore on the forest. And I don't blame the environmentalist at all for hollaring about it. I'm halfway a environmentalist myself, but I'm not a extreme environmentalist. I believe in seeing the country look nice and keep it nice. But I'm not in favor in going around like they're talking about the spotted owl. I'm pretty much opposed to that end of it. I think our forest needs to be harvested, but going in and taking out the old growth and have the young growth come. The way they've been doing it, they've been going in clearcutting it and all the young trees that have been 15 or 20 years growing, they cut 'em down and let 'em lay and burn 'em. And I think that is a very poor practice, myself. Because I'm not a forester and that's my own opinion. But, I certainly don't agree with their

practices. And they know about it, because I told 'em several times myself, what I thought about it. Also, my son has told 'em about it. He told 'em about it. But, it don't do any good. They have their own ideas about it and I suppose it comes from headquarters. I don't know where it comes from, but, anyway, it comes from somewhere.

RC: If you had to do everything all over again, what would you change?

AS: You mean in my lifestyle? Or what?

RC: Lifestyle, ranching...

AS: Well, I've loved ranching all my life, that's just in my blood, I guess. I liked it, I like, I didn't mind working, you know, and I've worked hard all my life. And I don't think I would ever qualify for another job, because I just couldn't stand sitting that long, you know, in an office job, you know, I just couldn't do it. I served on all these different committees, where you'll serve for one day and then you were off for a month or two and it worked fine. But, if I had done it everyday... One time I ran for county commissioner, but, thank god, I didn't get it, because I don't think I could have taken it and done it. Because, it would have drove me wild, you know, because, I was always a little nervous, when I was younger. I'd have to go sit all day and you can never agree, everybody don't agree. That's one thing, the whole time I sat on the Federal Land Bank Board on the A.F.C., we got into some good arguments but, I never, ever held a grudge in my life and we were just as good of friends as we were when we started. And I think that's the way it should be, myself. But, I'd never want to go and take a office job or anything. If I had to do it over again, I might change my lifestyle in the farming end of it. But, I'd still go into the livestock business, because that's something I like and I love this country up here. Because I've been here so many years and everytime when I go out, I see something new there I never seen before. A lot of people can ride through a area and see nothing. Everytime I ride through a area I see something different. That shows the difference, I suppose, in how some people think. I don't know, but I've covered I think about as many miles in this forest, more than any other man has ever did. I still enjoy it. Everytime I make a ride. I made that ride yesterday on Rattlesnake Mt.. I seen things I didn't realize they was up there before. You know, I see something new all the time. That is, I think the difference in people. One person can ride through and see nothing, and the other person can see all kinds of things. But, as far as the spotted owl is concerned, I rode these woods and I've rode 'em and rode 'em and I still have yet to see my first spotted owl. I've seen owls, but I don't think they were spotted owls. I don't know why they're so wild about that at all. I don't think they are ever going to be extinct. They live anyplace anything else does. That's the way I feel about it anyway.

RC: Lastly, but not least, what are your future plans, Albert?

AS: Well, I'm going to keep on going as long as I can. I am 86 years old now and I'm going on 87, pretty close, and I hope to do this as long as I can then I'm going to retire. My son still has a farm. I can go out there and enjoy myself and work with livestock a little bit as when I can. I can keep on riding a horse as long as I'm able to climb up on the saddle because that was most of the enjoyment I'll ever have was riding a horse. And milking. I can get up on a horse and keep up with anybody else at my age. So I feel that's one thing I am going to continue as long as I'm able to get up on a horse. Course I may not be able to do it for many more years. Nobody knows when your lifespan ends because it could end any time or it could last 10 years. Never know, I hope I have a few more years. My wife she wants me to retire but she says I've been at it long enough and it's time for you to quit.

RC: You said it was in your blood.

AS: It's in my blood - I guess it was born in me. Because that's all I've ever done except for a few odd jobs I tried. I worked for a grocery store for one year, you know, went to school and worked at a store, grocery store, on Saturdays from 5-8 in the evenings, but otherwise the only thing I ever did was ranching, livestock, dairying. I pulled cows for many many years. When we started out, we started by milking by hand then we got milking machines then you had to get down for a number of years had to get down and had to stoop by the cows as you milked her. That's the reason my knees are bad like they are because I got so hobbled I couldn't hardly get up and down anymore because I started down so many times. When you milk 200 cows and when you have to go along and skip about have of the ^{because} two of us are milking so thats a lot of times to get up and down, twice a day. But I still enjoyed it. I wouldn't want to get back into it today. If I had to go back into today, I'd never get into Dairying again but I would get into livestock. But that's where we made most of our money in the dairy business. Last few years we've done real good in the beef business but up until about 3 or 4 years ago you know. Beef prices were clear down to 50-52 cents a pound for a steer you know. You couldn't produce them for that. That was costing you more to produce them than what you got out of them. We're back in a slump right now but we think we're going to come back. That why we cut it down. We had a pretty good ^{year} We sold, we sold 150 head of cow last year at \$900 a head. That was aⁿ exceptionally good price. Each one had a calf, a young calf with it. When you can get that much out of a cow, why you're doing all right. We cut our head down now to 200 head. Well we probably got 300 head of cows but we keep about 100 head down in the valley there in the pastures we have to keep them down through summer months. We'll keep this range as long as my son wants to keep it. If he decides he wants to get out of it why I'll suppose we'll pull out and get out of it. As long as I'm able to come up here we'll stay in the cattle business. But its hard to get anybody who knows this country, you know, to look after cattle. It's just like when we sold the range to the Rogue River Ranch last year I spent quite a bit of my time showing them around and showing them the range and everything. The fellow did real well at learning it and he's getting around real good now. He knows this country pretty well from one end to the other.

RC: This concludes my questions Albert. Do you have any further comments you would like to make?

AS: Well I don't know just exactly what I want to say. I'm not out here to kind of brag myself up, being a special man or anything like that because I'm just an ordinary person just like everybody else is and I'm not out for any notoriety or anything like that. Several times I've got some pretty good write-ups on it because I suppose the way I did things, you know, come out in front. I've ~~had~~ come out in ~~the~~ the paper a few times. Quite a write-up. Trail Tribune a few years ago. I had quite a write-up in the Central Point American, come out how the Capital Press comes out with another Item again. And I was named Jackson County Cattleman of the Year which I considered quite an honor for me and all these years. I'm probably the oldest cattleman in the valley. So I figured maybe I was entitled to it I don't know. But I didn't look for it. I wasn't out to campaign for it. But it was a surprise for me. My son wanted me to come on down, he wanted me to the picnic with him and I said I don't know if I can or not. I said I'm kind of tied down and he says You come on out you can leave the horses out and turn ^{over} up out and leave 'em until the morning and leave 'em and come on down to the picnic. I was just kind of suspicious of something in the wind but I just didn't know what it was. I got a nice branding iron and a \$25 gift certificate for 2 free lunches at ~~M~~im's Restaurant in Medford. I thought

was very nice of them, you know, the Cattlemen of Jackson County. I appreciated that. Well, that's all I can tell you on that.

RC: I want to thank you very much ,Albert, for sharing with me.

AS: You're very welcome, what little good I could do ya. I tried my best. Some things I probably forgot I considered that should have been brought up. But anyways it don't make any difference you know. Because you know you're talking like this and it seems to come to your mind later on. You should have said things when you were talking but at the time it wasn't there. Glad to give you what little information I have. Anyway, you're certainly welcome to that.

RC: This concludes our interview with Albert Straus, historic rancher. The location of this interview was at Albert Straus' cabin on Fish Creek Road.

This is Randy Charon, Cultural Resource Technician with USDA Forest Service, Toketee Ranger Station, Umpqua National Forest.